



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 16 December 1968



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
16 DECEMBER 1968

1. Laos

The struggle in southern Laos between North Vietnamese forces and Laotian Government troops for control of the strategic village of Ban Thateng continues despite the pounding the Communists have received during the past two weeks. Vientiane has flown in fresh troops and supplies to bolster its forces but they do not appear adequate to push out the well dug-in North Vietnamese battalion holding one section of the village. There are indications, moreover, that the North Vietnamese are bringing up reinforcements for yet another assault on government positions. Regardless of the final outcome, the battle of Thateng appears likely to be the costliest engagement the North Vietnamese have ever fought in Laos.

2. Brazil

No widespread overt opposition to the government's severe repressive measures has yet been reported, and we believe active resistance will be slow to develop. Opponents of the army are still being rounded up, and the government is acting to strip many of them of their political rights. Leading army generals appear to be firmly in the saddle and presumably are now directing government policy. What this will eventually mean for Costa e Silva's position is not yet clear, but he now appears to be a virtual prisoner of the army.

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3. Panama

The National Guard appears to have carried out the occupation of the University of Panama on 14 December smoothly, efficiently, and without meeting any resistance. As partial justification for the action, the ruling junta has provided the press with a list of arms allegedly discovered in various parts of the university. The campus will remain closed for upwards of six months or until new legislation is passed permitting the school, in the words of the official communiqué, "to accomplish fully its lofty social commitments."

4. Thailand

Government forces are getting the worst of it as they try to stamp out insurgency in north-central Thailand. The tenacity, skill, and planning demonstrated by the Communist-led tribal insurgents suggest to us that veteran cadres, possibly coming from Laos, are leading the guerrillas. The present effort is the most successful launched by the Communists since insurgency broke out in Thailand four years ago and is having its psychological effect on the tribes in the area who are losing confidence in the government's ability to re-establish its control.

5. Dominican Republic

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6. Yugoslavia-Hungary

Arrival of a Hungarian Communist Party delegation to study economic reform measures in Belgrade is the first break in the almost total isolation of the Yugoslav party by the Warsaw Pact five since the Czechoslovak crisis. The visit could mark the beginning of a return to normalcy in relations between Tito and the Pact members, but it could also be primarily a solo fence-mending gesture by Kadar.

The Hungarians, mindful of their exposed position among potentially unfriendly states, have carefully avoided polemics with Yugoslavia during and following the Czech invasion. Kadar, moreover, has long prided himself on his ability to read smoke signals from Moscow and determine what actions are tolerable to the Kremlin. Whether he is a stalking horse for Moscow or acting on his own should become clear in the near future.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of U S
Political Attitudes



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

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North Vietnam to Release Captured American Pilots:

We have no information to add to the broadcasts from Hanoi and Moscow monitored on 14 December to the effect that an unspecified number of US pilots will be released for Christmas.

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Hanoi Protests US Demilitarized Zone Activity:

The North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry has condemned "repeated encroachments" on the Demilitarized Zone

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by the US in a 14 December broadcast in English. The broadcast claimed the US had "wantonly" bombed and shelled many places in the Demilitarized Zone and sent troops into the southern half of the zone causing "heavy losses in lives and property" to the local population.

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Another 14 December Hanoi broadcast in English reported that North Vietnamese negotiator Ha Van Lau had protested to the US in Paris about the DMZ "encroachments," as well as US reconnaissance flights and "bombardments" in "many areas" of North Vietnam. Such broadcasts appear to be for the record rather than signaling any new moves by Hanoi.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

There is nothing of significance to report today.

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